

COMPARISON/CONTRAST

What is it?

Comparison answers the question: What are the similarities between two subjects? Contrast answers the question: What are the differences between two subjects? Comparison/Contrast answers the question: What are the similarities and differences between two subjects? Comparison/Contrast puts two things alongside each other and evaluates each in relation to the other.

Why? What is the purpose?

One of the purposes of comparison/contrast is to compare alternatives and make choices. By putting two subjects side by side, you can explain them clearly. Then you can evaluate which is the better choice and provide reasons for your choices that will justify your judgment.

Another purpose can be to allow each subject to illuminate the other, as when comparing two novels. In this case, you don't need to make a choice, creating a hierarchy by elevating one subject over another, in your evaluation. Looking at the differences and similarities between the two subjects enables you to evaluate the meaning of each subject. For example, a comparison/contrast essay on African figurative sculpture and Picasso's figurative sculpture might reveal that visual culture in African culture supported spiritual traditions whereas modernist European art supported individualism and the concept of "genius."

How? What is the technique?

The technique is to compare/contrast two (or more) subjects (S1, S2) in terms of certain categories of comparison (a,b,c,d). Here are some templates for comparison/contrast statements:

Comparison: *S1 and S2 are similar in terms of a, b, and c.*

Contrast: *S1 and S2 are different in terms of a, b, and c.*

Comparison/Contrast: *Although S1 and S2 are different in terms of a, b, and c, they are alike in terms of d.*

1. Make sure the two subjects are comparable in a meaningful way. Comparing apples and oranges as both are fruit might be useful. Comparing apples and pinecones because both can be thrown at passing cars might not be very meaningful.
2. Consider the categories, or terms, of comparison. You have to compare the same kinds of things about both subjects. If you discuss the colour of apples, but not the taste, and the taste of oranges, but not the colour, there is no comparison.
3. Phrase your main idea as a statement like the templates above.
4. Once you've chosen your structure, do a chart of the differences and similarities, as this will organize your ideas and evidence for developing an outline. Each subject should have its own column and each category of comparison should have a row that goes across both columns.

CATEGORIES OF COMPARISON	AFRICAN SCULPTURE	PICASSO SCULPTURE
STYLE	Stylized figuration	Stylized figuration
CONTENT	Deities, ancestor figures	Formalist representations
CONTEXT	Spiritual traditions	European Modernism

5. Choose the best structure for your composition: chunk or slice. Chunk (AB) is better for short comparisons and slice (AB, AB, AB) is better for long ones. In the chunk structure, the subjects organize the composition and it is easy to forget to compare the same categories about each subject. In slice, the categories organize each subject so you must remember to compare both subjects on all categories.

CHUNK

Introduction

THESIS: A comparison of African figurative sculpture with Picasso's figurative sculpture reveals that visual culture in African culture supported spiritual traditions whereas modernist European art supported individualism and the concept of "genius."

A. African Sculpture

- 1. style
- 2. content
- 3. context

B. Picasso Sculpture

- 1. style
- 2. content
- 3. context

Conclusion

SLICE

Introduction

THESIS: A comparison of African figurative sculpture with Picasso's figurative sculpture reveals that visual culture in African culture supported spiritual traditions whereas modernist European art supported individualism and the concept of "genius."

1. Style

- A. African sculpture
- B. Picasso sculpture

2. Content

- A. African sculpture
- B. Picasso sculpture

3. Context

- A. African sculpture
- B. Picasso sculpture

Conclusion

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